

VZCZCXRO3737
OO RUEHBI
DE RUEHLM #2126 3601206
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 261206Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5022
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9732
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6670
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4736
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3415
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0414
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3507
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2589
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7234
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5003
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1648
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

UNCLAS COLOMBO 002126

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [EWWT](#) [ETRD](#) [EAGR](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: LTTE BOARDS JORDANIAN SHIP, RUNS IT
AGROUND; CREW AND CARGO SAFE

¶1. (U) On December 23, the Jordanian vessel "Faraha 3," carrying 14,000 metric tons of rice from southern India to South Africa, had engine failure and anchored in Sri Lanka's northern territorial waters. Newspapers reported that Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres boarded the ship, ran it aground at Mullaitivu, and took the 25 crew members (Jordanians and Egyptians, with an Iraqi captain) into custody. On December 25, media reported that the LTTE released the crew to the Red Cross. Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) officials told the press the LTTE tried to capture the ship, while papers quoted an LTTE spokesman saying the Tigers had "rescued" the crew.

¶2. (SBU) On December 26, Lt. Col. Rohan Joseph of the Media Center for National Security told Pol FSN that the ship's second-in-command had initially noticed six small boats surrounding the Faraha 3 and in English had asked the vessels to identify themselves. In response, the "Sea Tiger" cadres fired weapons into the air and forcibly boarded the Faraha 3, Joseph said. The ship's captain sent distress calls to the Maritime Rescue Coordinating Center in the UK, which alerted the Sri Lankan Navy. The LTTE reportedly forced the Faraha 3's crew to raise anchor and sail toward Mullaitivu, where the ship ran aground. Joseph also told us that the ship's captain accused the LTTE of removing radars, communications equipment, and other valuable items from the ship. Joseph further reported that the LTTE offered to buy vessel's rice cargo from the ship's local agent.

¶3. (SBU) We received independent confirmation of the captain's report from a contact at the "Daily Mirror" who attended a press briefing in Colombo in which the captain leveled the accusation that the LTTE took the crew to Mullaitivu by force and removed equipment from the ship. The captain estimated the total loss of cargo and equipment at 12 million dollars.

¶4. (SBU) As of December 26, the Faraha 3 remains aground in Mullaitivu with its cargo intact. Joseph said a team of Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) engineers is on stand-by awaiting instructions to tow the vessel either to Trincomalee or

Colombo port. A naval contact told Econ FSN the operation will be difficult because the SLN has limited operations in the area. The ICRC transported the crew to Colombo, where they are staying at a hotel.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: It is, of course, hardly unusual for the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to give wildly differing accounts of the same incident. The Tamil Tigers clearly want the international community to perceive their action as a rescue mission, whereas the GSL has an interest in portraying it as an act of piracy. In this case, the captain's account appears to corroborate the government's version.

BLAKE